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ABSTRACT

Research on audience response to television suggests that viewers are actively involved, apply identifiable and consistent evaluative criteria, and have distinct ideas about the role of the medium in their lives. In light of this research, a study focused on 264 randomly selected sixth through tenth grade students in a Tennessee school system to determine the influence of television on their lives. The subjects wrote essays in their English classes describing what they felt to be the influence of television on them, their family, or American society. Essays were coded for both the number and type of influence cited by each student. Results indicated little evidence of clear-cut positive or negative interpretations of the medium's influences. Students identified a wide variety of both positive and negative effects. At least 90% of the subjects had something positive to say about television, and its entertainment value and usefulness as an information source were frequently cited. Only 62% of the sample identified at least one negative influence of television, and the most frequent criticism was that exposure to television sex, drugs, and violence might negatively affect impressionable viewers' behavior. Multivariate analyses indicated that both IQ and grade level were significantly related to mentions of positive and negative influences of television, with older and brighter students tending to be more negative and cynical about television's effects. (SKC)

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The Effects of Television: Views from the Next Generation

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The Effects of Television:
Views from the Next Generation

This study examines viewers' responses to television's influences on their lives. It is based on student essays produced by sixth through tenth graders. Essays were coded for both the number and type of influences cited by each student. Results suggest that there is little evidence of clearcut positive or negative interpretations of the medium's influences. Students tended to identify a wide variety of both positive and negative effects of the medium. Multivariate analyses indicate that both IQ and grade level were significantly related to mentions of positive and negative influences of the medium.

The Effects of Television:
Views from the Next Generation

Research on the public's assessment of broadcasting dates back to 1937, with the founding of the Office of Radio Research, headed by Paul Lazarsfeld. The purpose of the office was "to study what radio means in the lives of listeners." Studies directed by the Office of Radio Research included investigations of general attitudes toward broadcasting (1946, 1948), as well as the audience's responses to specific program genre, exemplified by Herzog's (1944) study of daytime serials based on detailed interviews with audience members. Herzog went beyond questions of audience demographics and estimates of the amount of time spent listening to daytime serials. She probed listeners for explanations of <u>why</u> they tuned in to the serials each day; she asked them to discuss <u>what</u> specifically these programs offered. Herzog was interested in understanding the meaning of the medium in the lives of the daytime serial audience.

Research inquiring into audience members' understanding of the meaning of broadcast media in their lives continued with the introduction of television. Steiner's (1963) original survey of the public's response to, and evaluation of, the medium was replicated a decade later by Bower (1973). In addition, the Roper Organization (see, for example, Roper, 1973, 1983) has continued to monitor trends in public assessments of television. In essence, this research demonstrates that the public's ratings of television have been and continue to be positive. Comstock, Chaffee, Katzman, McCombs, and

Roberts (1978) have summarized the general tone of the findings as follows: "...the public as a whole has expressed high esteem for television...(p. 128).

However, with the emergence of television, the emphasis in research on the public's response to broadcast media gradually shifted. Initial concerns focused on audience members' detailed individual accounts of the meaning of broadcasting in their lives. As television assumed the dominant position in the marketplace, the major research question shifted to: How do viewers, as a group, evaluate the medium in comparison to existing media? For example, the Roper survey typically asks respondents which medium they rely on for most of their news; which medium they are most inclined to believe; and which medium gives the fairest, most unbiased news.

Studies of other media illustrate the significance of this shift in emphasis. For example, Radway (1984, 1986) investigated the meaning of romance novels in readers' lives. She used ethnographic interviewing techniques to gather a wealth of information and insight about the medium from readers using methods similar to those of Herzog in her study of radio's daytime serial audience. Radway's work is based on the assumption that "Interpretation and textual meaning...are as dependent on who the reader is, on how she understands the process of reading, and on the cultural context within which she operates, as they are on the text's verbal structure itself" (p. 53).

Radway's careful analysis of these extended interviews suggests the value of greater attention to audience members' unique understandings of the significance of particular media in their lives.

Radway challenges traditional reading theories that "grant primacy and ultimate power to the text itself" (p. 51). She characterizes such theories as "variations of the simple transmission-reception model of communication, whereby a sender's message is transmitted to a receiver via the medium of the printed text" (p. 51). She argues, instead, for theories based on the assumption that "reading is a productive activity in which a reader actively **makes** (emphasis hers) sense of the verbal inscriptions on the page" (p. 52).

Her assumptions regarding the active, sense-making approach on the part of audience members as they interact with the message or text has recently gained considerable support in the field of television research. Increasingly, researchers have abandoned a message orientation in favor of a viewer orientation; that is, there has been a tendency to abandon the traditional behavioral effects approach, based on the assumption that outcomes are directly related to message content, and a tendency to adopt an active viewer approach, focusing on the individual's understanding of the medium or the content. The latter is clearly the dominant approach in the research literature in both uses and gratifications investigations (for review, see Blumler & Katz, 1974; Rosengren, Wenner, & Palmgreen, 1985), as well as in recent studies of children and television (Bryant & Anderson, 1983; Pearl, Bouthilet, & Lazar, 1982).

The proliferation of studies adopting the active audience approach has once again raised questions about the nature of audience members' perceptions of media and the implications of these perceptions for understanding the role of media in the audience's lives. These issues

have been examined in a variety of ways. For example, Salomon (1981, 1983, 1984) has proposed that the audience member's context of expectations about a particular media experience is directly related to learning outcomes. He manipulated individuals' contexts of expectations by presenting identical content on two different media, books and television,and compared differential learning effects. He concluded that it was the expectations individuals had about the medium, not the content, that explained their learning. In similar work, Fredin and Krendl (1986, 1987) conducted a field experiment in which students used print or electronic media to conduct research. Based on analyses of students' knowledge on their research topics, as manifested in their term papers, the authors concluded that outcomes of media use are directly related to the expectations individuals bring to the media experience.

The theoretical orientation applied in these investigations treats the user's approach to a medium as a predictor of learning effects. However, a series of recent studies has adopted a different strategy. These investigations are less interested in effects resulting from media comparison studies than in extensive examinations of individuals' approaches to a specific medium, television.

The first (Porter, 1986) served as a pilot study for examining factors which contribute to individuals' interpretations of television content. Results indicated that viewers were actively involved in making sense of the program by formulating and testing predictions about the plot as the show proceeded. In addition, viewers relied on traditional literary elements such as theme identification to aid in

interpreting the meaning of the text.

The second investigation of interest here (Himmelweit, Swift, & Jaeger, 1980) examined the role of the viewer as critic; that is, researchers used viewers' reactions to programs to develop general principles for evaluating television content. The authors concluded:

> "The phenomenological approach to the study of entertainment reported here proved more promising than we had expected. This was due to a number of reasons, but first and foremost to the impressive way in which the viewers took to the task. Their willingness and ability to rate programs on a wide range of attributes showed that although the industry tends to think in terms of genres, the public looks at each program in its own right and not merely as a member of a family of programs" (p. 92-93).

Both of these studies challenge earlier assertions that television viewing is a mindless, passive activity (Mander, 1978; Winn, 1978). The results demonstrate that, in fact, viewers are actively involved in making sense of, formulating predictions about and evaluating television texts. Furthermore, audience members apply consistent and identifiable strategies in performing these tasks.

The third study, (Cojuc, 1984) dealt directly with viewers' perceptions of the meaning of television as a medium, as opposed to interpretations and evaluations of content presented on television. The author posed a series of open-ended questions to third through eighth graders in an effort to determine how individuals' predispositions to television are shaped. Students were asked to discuss a variety of factors, including parental communication about television, rules about television viewing in the home, and programs regularly viewed. In addition, students were asked to identify the

effects of television on themselves and on their peers. Content analysis procedures were then applied to the detailed interviews. According to the author:

> ...the impact of children's awareness, conceptions and expectations about how television operates in, and is a part of, their world is a question that we have only begun to deal with. It has been necessary to determine first that children in fact hold very specific notions concerning this medium...(p. 15).

Thus, the research focusing on the viewers' responses to the medium suggests active involvement, the application of identifiable and consistent evaluative criteria, and distinct ideas about the role of the medium in their lives. The purpose of this paper is to examine this final proposition systematically. It does so by analyzing individuals' descriptions of the medium in terms of the nature and content of their perceptions, assumptions and concerns about television's effects. The approach applied to the analysis of viewers' responses is based on the work of Cojuc (1984) and Rowland (1982). In essence, both authors characterized individuals' general responses to television as dichotomous--positive or negative. Rowland explained the history of this dichotomous split in his study of the politics of television research:

> ...the conflicting reactions generated by television included the extreme poles of evaluation, taking it as both messianic and demonic. As the newest, most spectacular piece of communications technology, television was cast by the American progressive tradition as the repository of hope for a revived democratic process, a stronger set of social bonds, a richer cultural life, and a vastly improved educational system. On the other hand, it was perceived by established institutions and brokers of morality and values as the latest and most dangerous in a series of technological and social inroads on their authority and status. It represented yet another assault on the family, interpersonal

> relationships and small-scale local forms of community by large, bureaucratic, impersonal, and nationally oriented forms of organization. From this perspective, the political, social, and cultural orders were in serious jeopardy (p.23).

Thus, this study examines viewers' understanding of the role of television in their lives, based on the traditional messianic-demonic polar responses to the medium.

Method

The data examined here are based on content analyses of student essays about television. All of the approximately 1500 students in the sixth through tenth grades in a school system in Tennessee were asked by their English teachers on the same day to write an essay fulfilling the requirements of the following assignment during their regular English class period:

> Discuss the influence of television on you, your family, or American society.

No additional guidance was provided by the teachers in terms of the content of the essay. Students were free to write whatever they wanted in response to the instructions. A random sample of 264 essays was drawn from the student papers for the purposes of this study. This sample of students then completed self-administered questionnaires providing demographic information about themselves. In addition, students' IQ scores were obtained from school records.

A coding scheme was devised to assess the specific influences of television cited by students. Coders were asked to record the content of each particular television effect mentioned, as well as its nature (positive, negative or mixed) and to count the total number of each type of effects specified in the essays.

Coding in this manner did not rely on the individual sentence as the primary unit of analysis. Rather, the specific influence cited was the primary unit of analysis. Thus, one sentence could include multiple influences of both a positive and negative nature. For example, the following sentence includes two positive influences of television--learning and entertainment: "You may either learn education through a television program or you may be entertained to pass time by." In addition, coders were instructed to note whether authors of the essays included overt statements of their overall, global impression of the medium in terms of its positive, negative or mixed impact on the individual, the family or the society (intercoder reliabilities on measures of both specific and global influences averaged .90).

Results

The analyses presented below first discuss the specific isolated positive and negative influences cited by students. We then turn to an examination of students' global perceptions of the medium, in terms of positive, negative and mixed influences. Global perceptions refer to students' explicit summary statements about television's overall influences. Finally, we present multivariate analyses, wherein the number of positive and negative influences mentioned are treated as dependent variables, and student IQ and grade level serve as independent variables. We anticipated that brighter and older students would be likely to be more negative and cynical about television's effects, but previous research (Cojuc, 1984) reported no systematic age differences in perceptions of positive and negative effects.

Specific Positive Influences. At least 90% of the group of sixth through tenth graders involved in the sample had something positive to say about television. Furthermore, these data indicate that 70% of the respondents identified two or more such beneficial influences. An analysis of those who responded favorably reveals certain trends in the essays.

The most frequently mentioned favorable response was that watching television provided entertainment. Seventy-five percent viewed television as an entertainment medium, one that provided them with particular types of programming alternatives. Respondents frequently commented on the diversity of programming and mentioned particularly favored shows by name (e.g. The A Team, M*A*S*H). To watch television was to have fun and to be entertained.

Example:

> We also watch television for entertainment. When we watch television you get a variety of choices. You see movies that you might see in movie theaters or some that are made just for television. Also, for entertainment you have the regular shows. You get comedy such as Three's Company and Carol Burnett, drama as in the soap operas, wartipe shows such as the A-Team, mysteries like Remington Steele, lots of game shows like Tic-Tac-Dough, Family Feud, and the Price is Right, and regular life shows like Webster. There are cartoons and small children's shows for pre-schoolers and other younger children."[1]

Another prevalent response for those affirming television's positive impact was that television watching keeps them informed about the society in which they live, as well as informing them about other societies. This influence was directly tied to television news shows. Television was believed to be an important source of information about the world; it was valued because of its immediacy and topicality.

Nearly half of this group (47%) mentioned television as the medium to which they tuned to keep abreast of vital information.

Example:

> Many news programs are seen daily on television. Thus people who watch are kept informed as to what goes on day to day in the world around them. Often news commentaries, political interviews, and fine arts performances are seen on t.v."

Television was seen not only as an information dispenser; it was also seen more generically as an <u>educational medium</u> by 45% of those mentioning at least one favorable influence of television. Specifically, students in the sample wrote about the television viewing environment as a learning environment. Educational television was mentioned frequently, with particular examples taken from programming aimed directly at children (e.g. <u>Sesame Street</u>), as well as cultural programming.

Example:

> Sesame Street helps kids with things like the alphabet and reading. Other shows are educational to older people, too. For example, just about every month there's a J. Cousteau program on. These educate us with facts about biological life in many different parts of the world. PBS is a good channel if you want an educational program.

Another positive influence students closely linked with the medium's capabilities of keeping them informed and providing educational and intellectually stimulating programming was that television can fulfill the audience's <u>specialized information needs</u>. For instance, they pointed out that a person could seek out sports information or local weather forecasts.

Example:

"The news tells about the future weather. It would tell you if it was going to rain. This information would be helpful you could find out when bad weather was coming and replan a vacation or hiking trip to a later date."

In the essays, television was often seen not as a generic source of programs designed to appeal to a mass audience but, instead, was considered a delivery system which tried to provide information applicable to specific interests. This characteristic was cited by 21% of those mentioning favorable television effects.

Fifteen percent of this group also believed that watching television provided an opportunity to relieve stress resulting from problems encountered throughout the day.

Example:

"There are alot of reasons we watch television too. One of the main reasons is for enjoyment and pleasure. Another reason is if you are dealing with allot strease a funny television program may help the strees go away."

Television was viewed as a medium that could help them unwind, a medium to enhance relaxation.

Advertising was classified by 15% as a positive attribute of television. They viewed advertisements as providing a public service, keeping viewers informed about the latest products and services available on the market. Commercials, they wrote, provided them with images of the good life--what's in; what's not. Also, just as newspapers and magazines provide coupons and rebates, students noted that television ads informed them of rebates and sales on products. They pointed out that this knowledge increased their buying power.

Example:

...advertising lets you know what is new on the market. Commercials also let you know of special sales and rebates.

Another positive aspect of television cited by 14% of the respondents who mentioned something positive about television was the availability of movies, particularly free ones available on network television. These students felt that movies offered by the networks as part of their programming fare were extra bonuses beyond the conventional programming schedule. Because admission prices continue to increase at movie theaters, these offerings provided an opportunity for them to see some good movies for free at home.

Example:

Instead of going to the movie theater to see a movie, you can see the movie on television; this can save you money.

The final positive influence mentioned by 5% of this group was that television often serves as a social companion for people. This factor was specifically mentioned in connection with conditions of old age, illness or institutionalization, which isolate individuals from contact with other people, as well as with other environments. They viewed television as a life-line to society for those unable to participate fully. Not only did students feel that an individual can stay informed through television, but they also believed that television provides a way to pass the time when one is incapacitated or unable to pursue other interests.

Example:

Some of our old people and others don't have one person that will come to them and listen, they don't have a family. That's why they watch t.v. to have a family. To love and be loved. T.V. gives us a home

when we have none.

Specific Negative Influences. A smaller proportion of the entire sample identified at least one negative influence of television (62%) than mentioned at least one positive influence (90%). Thirty-three percent of the entire sample offered only one negative influence, with 29% citing more than one negative effect (versus 70% of the sample who named more than one positive impact).

The most frequently cited criticism of television viewing was the negative behavioral effects which could result from exposure to specific types of content. Students who mentioned these effects (78% of those who mentioned any negative effects) were predominantly concerned with television's depictions of violence, drugs and drug usage and sexual content. Many students were concerned that the exposure to such subject matter had a negative impact on behavior, particularly on young children's behavior.

Example:

> T.V. shows kids that in some cause drugs are cool. I mean, like in some shows that's the "thing" to do. But in other shows it isn't the "thing" to do. When kids see these things they either think it's ok or not, even if it is against the law.
>
> Violence on tv has been said to make a lot of people think that real people won't die. Because on tv the actors don't die so some people think they can shoot someone and not kill them. Sometimes they think they can rob a bank and get away because the people on tv did.
>
> With the sex on tv kids think its o.k. to do a lot of things that it really isn't o.k. to do. They think they can have fun with someone over, say, spring break, and at the end just forget it ever happened. Or if a guy gets a girl pregnant than he thinks all he has to do is get the girl to have an abortion and thats it. But in real life it isn't that easy.

Also, they feared that drugs and drug users were omnipresent and overly

glamorized. Explicit sexual content was criticized as too prevalent and not restricted to late viewing hours. The students expressed concern about younger children's exposure to such content. Most of the authors of essays which mentioned these negative effects assumed that overexposure to television violence, drugs and sexual content would result in imitative behavior.

Fifty-two percent of those who mentioned negative effects alluded to the negative influence of television's displacement effect. They noted that television viewing often detracts from participation in more constructive or worthwhile activities. These students equated television viewing with wasting one's time, with being lazy. Their focus was on possible alternatives to what they described as a habitual dedication to television viewing established by routine rather than by conscious choice. They argued that for some people watching television induces a kind of lethargy that consumes their leisure time and results in disinclinations to break out of the television viewing habit.

Example:

> People who watch television do so because they have have nothing better to do. They come home from work or school and plop down in front of the television until suppertime. They watch anything, just as long as the television is on. These people do so because they lack the intelligence and imagination to do something constructive. I believe that this is a waste.

Of the group who mentioned any negative effects of television, 26% referred in some way to the medium's distortion of the world. These comments were directly linked to three distinct content areas: television advertising, news coverage and entertainment programming. Of these three types of content, television commercials received the

most comments from the students for presenting distorted information. Eleven percent of those citing negative effects specifically mentioned commercials. It is rather surprising that this was slightly lower than the proportion who mentioned the positive effects of commercials (15%). Negative comments on commercials addressed two separate issues. Students were concerned not only about the emphasis commercials placed on conspicuous consumption and the glamorization of the good life, which they considered to be distortions of the real world, but they also noted the constant bombardment of television advertising, its unrelenting intrusion into program content. These students expressed feeling insulted by a commercial's approach, or manipulated into buying products they did not need.

Example:

> We are all glad to see well made shows, but television's purpose is advertisement. The stations show too many commercials during one show. They try to trick, con, and fool you into buying their products.

Next we turn to comments regarding television news coverage. Eight percent of the students who mentioned negative influences of television complained that the news is predominantly negative. They pointed out that violence and catastrophe are the focus of most news shows and stated that they would like to see more constructive, positive or uplifting representations of the world. In addition, some of the papers criticizing television news cited specific examples of news stories which they felt had been distorted by broadcast news reporters.

Example:

> But, in some cases, the kinds of news that is broadcast

> is harmful. For instance, CNN news broadcast the trial of the accused rapists on television all over the U.S. This brought out two bad reactions by people who were influenced in watching the trial. First of all many rape victims, most of them women, were afraid of telling authorities of what had happened to them because they were afraid if the consequences of a trial. The television broadcasts had shown harsh and often proving examinations by the defense attorney. These victims were afraid that their personal life would also be brought out into public. Secondly, a young boy who watched the trial tried to copy the events of the rape. He and a couple of friends tried to rape a young girl in their basement much like the accused rapists had done. These examples show that television news can be harmful.

Finally, students addressed what they believed to be television's unrealistic portrayals of people, events and situations which exaggerate or falsely depict real life. These portrayals, they noted, could result in a false impression of the world.

Example:

> Television produces a distorted view of life in most cases. It usually depicts a life of luxury and glamour, where everyone is funny, good-looking, or both. Life is not the slightest challenge to most of these people.

The remainder of the negative effects cited in the students' essays were rather small in terms of percentage of the total sample. Eleven percent of the negative responses to television cited actual <u>physical effects</u> or manifestations which resulted from television viewing. Some complained that snacking routines triggered by suggestive commercials had a negative impact on both nutrition (junk food snacks) and weight (calories consumed in a stationary activity). Other respondents mentioned a somnambulist-like physical state that they believed could result from excessive television viewing.

<u>Global Perceptions of the Medium</u>. Because the wording of the topic for

the essay assignment encouraged students to think in terms of specific television effects on themselves, their families, or society, slightly more than half of the student papers (52%) did not include any kind of global statement about the influences of the medium. These student essays, as was expected, tended to present a mixture of specific, isolated positive and negative effects attributed to television.

However, even though the wording of the writing topic predisposed students to think in terms of specific effects, 48% included a global assessment of the media in their essays. Of these, 21% explicitly stated that the medium had mixed, both positive and negative effects.

Mixed Example:

> "Television has a great influence on the American society. Some are bad and some are good, and it mostly depends on how you look at it."

The remaining 27% included a straightforward, one-sided global statement similar to those described by Rowland (1982) about the generally positive or negative effects of television. These clearcut responses to the medium were split with two-thirds mentioning overall positive effects and one-third mentioning overall negative influences.

Positive Example:

> "But altogether the television is a very useful and popular things that people use all around the world. Without it the Earth may be a very boring place to live in."

Negative Example:

> "What it all comes down to is this: Television is a young member of our culture but in its short life span it has wrapped its tendrils around our throats and has begun to siphon all our will to invent and all our curiosity out of us, and it is all our fault."

Multivariate Analyses

We were also interested in determining whether students with different backgrounds and intellectual abilities would differ significantly in their perceptions' of the positive and negative influences of television. Thus, we examined correlations between the number of positive and negative effects cited by students in relation to student IQ and grade level. Results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 about here

As the correlations indicate, student IQ was positively and significantly related to the number of both positive (.13) and negative (.15) television effects mentioned. Thus, the higher the student's IQ score, the more likely he or she was to mention both positive and negative influences of television. Grade level, as shown in Table 1, was also significantly related to both positive (-.18) and negative (.35) television effects, with younger students mentioning more positive effects and older students more negative effects.

We used analysis of covariance procedures to remove the variance attributable to student IQ and then to test for effects of grade on the positive and negative content of students' essays about the medium. Group means, controlling for the effects of IQ, are presented in Tables 2 and 3 below and demonstrate that grade level is significantly related to mentions of both positive [$F(5,258)=5.15$, $p<.01$] and negative [$F(5,258)=17.63$, $p<.01$] effects of television.

Tables 2 and 3 about here

Examination of the mean scores indicates that the differences in the number of positive and negative influences appeared in lower grades. Note that the youngest group, the sixth graders, had a mean score of 2.36 for positive influences and .67 for negative influences, as opposed to the oldest group, the tenth graders, who had a mean of 1.49 for positive influences and 1.67 for negative influences. Younger students cited multiple positive television influences but very few negative influences. Older students, on the other hand, tended to mention nearly equal numbers of both kinds of influences.

Discussion

These findings demonstrate that among members of the next generation there is little evidence of a straightforward demonic or messianic interpretation of television's effects, as identified by Rowland (1982). The students did not expound at length about the decidedly negative effects of television on themselves, their families or society. Neither did their essays demonstrate a messianic belief in the good of the medium, though twice as many students mentioned overall positive influences as mentioned negative influences. Most important in terms of their global assessments of the medium, is the fact that nearly three-fourths of the students either did not express a one-sided positive or negative view of television, or they explicitly stated that the influences of the medium consist of a mixture of both positive and negative effects. Thus, the traditional dichotomous, positive-negative

split is not representative of current views of the medium among the members of the next generation of television viewers.

In addition, IQ and grade level were significantly related to mentions of both positive and negative influences of television. IQ was positively related to mentions of both types of influences, whereas grade level was positively related only to the number of negative influences mentioned. It was inversely related to the number of positive influences mentioned. Examination of the group means for older and younger students demonstrates that older students were, in fact, more balanced in their assessments of the influences of the medium rather than more negative, as was anticipated. Younger students, by comparison, were much more likely to identify numerous positive influences, whereas older students were more likely to cite both positive and negative influences. Thus, as students mature, their views of the medium appear to become more moderate, not more negative.

This study suggests that among the next generation of television viewers, the medium is a familiar and highly integrated medium whose effects on individuals, families and society are many and varied. Many student essays pointed out that television has the potential to serve as a positive or a negative influence on people's lives; that is, the medium itself is neither a demon nor a messiah. As one student tried to explain, we cannot hold the medium alone responsible for various positive or negative effects.

> All in all T.V. has a positive influence on society but it must be kept within perspective. People must use it to get a laugh and to become more aware of the world they live in but it must not stop there. They must than use what they have gained to continue the development of new ideas and techniques throughout the world.

These student essays, as a whole, demonstrate the richness and diversity articulated by the next generation in regard to their understanding of television's influence on themselves, their families and American society. As both Herzog (1944) and Radway (1984, 1986) discovered in their studies of radio and romance novels, audience members have, indeed, thought extensively about the role of various media in their lives. Individuals have unique perceptions about media, and their comments are often thoughtful and sophisticated. Their comments certainly do not seem indicative of a passive, mindless audience. The essays demonstrate distinct notions across students about the significance of both the individual's use of the medium, as well as its broader social impact. The hope is that a better understanding of individuals' responses to and insights about media will inform research and result in the formulation of meaningful questions regarding their significance in contemporary society.

Footnotes

[1]Examples from student papers are presented verbatim.

Table 1

Correlations of Student IQ and Grade
with Positive and Negative Television Effects

	IQ	Grade
Number of Positive Effects Mentioned	.13*	-.18**
Number of Negative Effects Mentioned	.15**	.35**

N=264

*p<.05
**p<.01

Table 2

Adjusted Group Means Controlling for IQ
for Number of Positive Television Effects Mentioned

Grade	
Sixth	2.36
Seventh	2.18
Eighth	2.50
Ninth	2.11
Tenth	1.49

Table 3

Adjusted Group Means Controlling for IQ
for Number of Negative Television Effects Mentioned

	Adjusted Group Means
Grade	
Sixth	.67
Seventh	.57
Eighth	.67
Ninth	1.70
Tenth	1.67

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